Digital Resilience and Social Cognition: A Thematic Exploration of Adolescent Experiences

SHORT SYNOPSIS

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Certificate

I hereby declare that the Short Synopsis titled "Digital Resilience and Social Cognition: A Thematic Exploration of Adolescent Experiences" being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Applied Psychology under School of Behaviour and Social Sciences of Manav Rachna International Institute of Research & Studies, Faridabad during the academic year 2025. It is a bona fide record of original work carried out under the supervision of Dr Divya Dhawan. It has not been submitted in full or in part to any other university or institute for a degree or diploma. Further, it is certified that Short Synopsis is plagiarism-free, and proof has been submitted.

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Abstract

Digital resilience involves recognising and understanding online risks, seeking help from others when needed, learn from prior experiences, and feeling confident in oneself. Social cognition is how we understand and make sense of social information around us, such as interpreting the actions, emotions and intentions of others to manage the social connections in the digital world. The purpose of this study is to understand how adolescents identify, respond to, and deal with online adverse situations on social media. This study will look at the digital resilience and social cognition among adolescents while engaging on social media. The research will use an exploratory research design to understand how adolescents perceive the social interactions and issues while using social media. Adolescents between the ages of 14 and 17 from the Delhi NCR region will be considered for the study. Purposive and Snowball sampling techniques will be used to include adolescents from diverse backgrounds (gender, socioeconomic status, school type). Semi-structured interviews will be conducted. The data will be analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) model of thematic analysis. This research will examine the perspectives of adolescents during online challenges on social media.

Keywords: *Adolescents, Digital Resilience, Social Cognition, Social Media*

Table of Contents

	Certificate	i
	Abstract	ii
	Table of Contents	iii

S. No.	Contents	Page No.
1.	Introduction	1-8
	1.1 Digital Resilience 1.1.1 Attributes of digital resilience 1.1.2 Characteristics of Digitally Resilient Students 1.1.3 Digital Resilience Framework 1.1.4 Socio-Ecological Conceptual Framework 1.1.5 Main Types of Online Risks 1.1.6 Nature of Digital Challenges and Threats to Adolescents	1-5
	1.2 Social Cognition 1.2.1 Types of Social Cognition	6
	1.3 Adolescents	7
	1.4 Social Media	7
2	Review of Literature and Research Gaps	8-20
3	Description of Broad Area	20
4	Research Objectives	20
5	Research Question	20
6	Research Methodology	21-24
7	Expected Outcome	24
	References	
	Similarity Verification Report	
	Grammarly Certificate	

1. Introduction

In today's digital world, social media and online communication are becoming an integral part of young people. People are tired of excessive screen time, challenging online situations, and continually engage with others via social media (Eri et al., 2021). Despite these challenges, some people remain hopeful and manage online challenges (Ang et al., 2022)

1.1 Digital Resilience

Digital resilience involves recognising and understanding online risks, seeking help from others when needed, learn from prior experiences, and feeling confident in oneself. Individuals who possess these skills can effectively overcome the online challenges (Sun et al., 2022).

1.1.1 Attributes of Digital Resilience

According to Sun et al. (2022), the capacity to maintain and improve well-being when facing online challenges, both in terms of behaviour and psychosocial aspects, is referred to as digital resilience. It can be achieved by recognising online threats, finding remedies, developing adaptable abilities, recovering from stressful situations, and improving self-efficacy. It helps individuals to manage challenges in the digital world. It has a cyclic process, i.e., an ongoing learning process. It highlights the building of a person to deal with online challenges (Sharma et al., 2021). Digital resilience arises from five interconnected attributes. They are:

Understanding Online Threats

This is the first step in building digital resilience. An individual recognises the risks, such as webinar fatigue, unhealthy interactions on social media use, addiction, problematic online behaviour, or cyberbullying (Hammond et al., 2015). A person must have an awareness of online challenges (Sharma et al., 2021).

Knowing solutions

The ability of a person to think critically and consider the pros and cons in a challenging situation. Knowing what the support systems are and where to seek help, such as peers, parents, educators, or seeking support from organisations, enables a person to manage their online challenges responsibly (Reynolds & Parker, 2018).

Learning knowledge and skills

An individual builds digital literacy and skills to deal with new technical situations. A person can learn from experiences and be proactive in learning new things. People can protect themselves from online risky situations by having the technical knowledge (Tran et al., 2020).

Recovering from stress

A person can recover from a wrong online situation with a healthy support system. A supporting environment can enable a person to adapt to a problem and bounce back after online adversity (Sharma et al., 2021; Eri et al., 2021).

Moving forward through self-efficacy

A person has confidence in moving forward and overcoming future challenges. Self-efficacy in a person can enable them to be confident in dealing with online challenges in the future (Hammond et al., 2015). A student who has the ability to not get distracted from studies is also digitally resilient, as they have learned the skills of avoiding distractions. In this step, a person is not just recovering; they thrive in digital spaces (Bluteau et al., 2020).

1.1.2 Characteristics of Digitally Resilient Students

According to Lee & Hancock (2023), a student who is resilient in an online platform should

i. Develop digital literacy to manage online environments.
ii. Build self-confidence in using technology to solve digital challenges and take a stand for themselves in the digital space.
iii. Able to support their friends and family in an online harmful situation
iv. Have a help-seeking behaviour from their parents, friends, or educators.

1.1.3 Digital Resilience Framework

The United Kingdom Council of Internet Safety (UKCIS, 2020) published the digital resilience framework. Resilience is the ability to access and use available support systems, tools, and skills to cope with the challenges. Digital resilience applies this idea to technology, the internet, and the digital world. It enables a person to deal with the risks they face while using social media, explore something, or work online. It develops mainly through experiences. Strong supporting connections with trusted people can help strengthen digital resilience in an individual when dealing with challenges (UKCIS, 2020). It is a continuous psychological process that develops through active interaction in the online world. It is a skill

that develops over time. Rather than avoiding risks and being in a 'safe' online space. Digital resilience develops through active engagement with the digital world, facing challenges and learning from them (UKCIS, 2020).

Key Domains of Digital Resilience Framework

The four key process domains of the Digital Resilience Framework, 2020, are as follows:
Learn: the ability of a person to learn from their experiences and be able to adjust accordingly.
Understand: the ability of a person to identify online risk and make decisions to stay safe in the digital world.
Know: the ability of a person to take help from their support system or available resources to stay safe.
Recover: the ability of a person to recover from online risks after getting appropriate support from others.

1.1.4 Socio-Ecological Conceptual Framework

The socio-ecological framework is a multi-level model used to understand the behaviours and outcomes of an individual that are influenced by their social environment (Ungar, 2021). According to Hammond et al. (2022), the role of digital resilience in the four interconnected levels of this framework is:

Individual level
At the individual level, resilience to personal vulnerabilities and protective factors of an individual are explored. Protective factors help an individual to recover and adapt after facing adverse challenges. Self-efficacy, emotional regulation, and hope towards life help people to manage their well-being and enable them to deal with challenging situations. In the context of digital resilience, studies examined more online risks due to offline mental illness or vulnerabilities of a person. Researchers found that stronger digital skills might help a person in responding to these online risks responsibly and mindfully (Livingstone et al., 2021; Ungar, 2021).

Home level
Resilience at the home level focuses on family resilience. The supporting relationships give us warmth, cohesion, emotional and practical support. This level targeted the involvement of parents to look at the online world of their children (Chen & Shi, 2019). Parenting style fosters or hinders the resilience of their children. It should be enabling rather than restrictive by allowing their children to deal with online challenges and support them in developing their coping skills while exposing them to online risks (Livingstone et al., 2021).

Community level

At the community level, resilience involves interactions between social structures, networks, and activities of a community (Pfefferbaum et al., 2017). Social connectedness and social capital play a key role in enabling a community to adapt, communicate, and mobilise in response to challenges (Putnam, 2000). In the context of digital resilience, the focus is on the role of support from peers, educators, and others in learning digital literacy and risk management. There is a need to help vulnerable communities build resilience by giving them opportunities and supporting them (Pfefferbaum et al., 2017).

Societal level

It is the broadest level. Societal resilience focuses on the norms of culture and the facilities of institutions to recover and manage online adversities. The main support system is the government, tech companies, educators, civilians and norms of culture to manage threats.

Digital resilience helps by protecting users, adapting to challenges, and fostering equitable challenges to digital opportunities (Linkov & Trump, 2019).

1.1.5 Main Types of Online Risks

The three primary online risks that people may face during their everyday use of the internet are content risk, contact risk, and conduct risk (Livingstone & Haddon, 2012).

Content risks

When an adolescent accesses inappropriate or harmful material on the Internet. Dangerous content can also be found. It can be harmful for them. It may involve violent videos and distressing advertisements. Such exposure can negatively impact the emotional well-being of a person (Haddock et al., 2022).

Contact risks

The risk of interacting with others on the internet is called contact risk. Adolescents may encounter an individual who is unknown to them, who can cause harm to them, whether it is physical, emotional or sexual behaviour. The online users can exploit them and misuse their personal information in the wrong way (Qi et al., 2024).

Conduct risks

The risk of behaviour in teenagers is due to the possibility of being exposed to negative behaviour, exposure to harmful or unrealistic beliefs, cyberbullying, sexual harassment, misleading advertisements, and illegal use of their content without consent (Livingstone and Haddon, 2012).

The three risks highlight the fact that the online environment can be harmful or dangerous for young people because of the content and the unknown people they meet.

1.1.5 Nature of Digital Challenges and Threats to Adolescents

Over the past decade, the widespread usage of smartphones and the internet has made them an essential part of everyone's lives today. Adolescents are the first generation born in the era of digital revolution, where smartphones and the internet are common. Hence, they form a substantial portion of internet consumers, research shows that almost 90% of adolescents hold at least one social media account, and the numbers are only growing (Kucharczuk et al.,2022). This number is especially concerning when numerous studies that have established the link between mental health and social media are taken into account. In addition to socio-emotional issues like validation seeking, FOMO, social comparison, digital platforms also possess a heightened risk to online safety, peer conflict and smartphone addiction.

The rise has also given rise to smartphone addiction in adolescents. A meta-analysis of 924 studies found that 1 in 4 children and young people demonstrate problematic smartphone use, and it is also linked with poorer mental health, along with increased odds of depression, anxiety and higher perceived stress (Sohn et al.,2019). In addition to psychological problems, smartphone addiction is also linked with physiological problems like sleep-related issues, unhealthy eating habits, pain and migraines (Wacks et al.,2021).

Online spaces also increase socio-emotional challenges to adolescents, like Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) or the need for social validation. Adolescence is a phase of peer approval, attention seeking and constant comparison to others; social media fuels these needs; online appearance-related activities lead to internalisation of a thin ideal body and body dissatisfaction (Scully et al.,2020).

Digital platforms, although they provide a space for self-expression, learning increased opportunities to communication (Kharchenko et al.,2025), it also possess a heightened risk to safety of individuals and adolescents are an especially vulnerable group for that, privacy phishing scams and identity misuse scams are becoming more and more common with adolescents being the main target (Lahti et.,2024). Low effort rewards scams like free giveaways are especially common in adolescents (Verdu et al., 2025). Poor

awareness of legal help or reporting channels fuels adolescents' vulnerability to these scams (Shrejith et al.,2025).

1.2 Social Cognition

A mental process that informs our perception and interpretation of social signals and their significance is referred to as social cognition. Adolescence is a period of social growth in which young people become interested in the opinions and responses of others (Alvi et al., 2022).
Research has found that filtered posts of young people lead to unhealthy body comparison (Fardouly et al., 2015). Studies have found that neural reward centres react more strongly to social media "Likes" in teenagers' brains compared to adults (Sherman et al., 2016). Long-term studies suggest that adolescents who received guidance on social media tend to have better emotional resilience. Adolescents can enhance their ability to think critically by discussing unrealistic content on social media to evaluate content or by setting screen time limits (Stoilova et al., 2021).

1.2.1 Types of Social Cognition

Social cognition has interconnected domains. The three main types of social cognition are:
Social perception: A person can understand the nonverbal signals of others. Such as postures, tone of voice, and eye contact (Haza et al., 2024). The social perception is the ability to recognise the true face of people, interpret the direction of their eyes, and perceive the body language of people around us.

Social Understanding: An individual can understand the beliefs and intentions of another person. It is also known as 'Theory of mind' (Kushnir, 2022). It allows us to understand and interpret others' behaviour and adjust our actions accordingly. It is an essential skill for social interaction and decision-making (Frith & Frith, 2007).

Social decision-making: A person can use social information to make decisions about certain behaviour and choices in social contexts. These social cognition skills aren't fixed. They can be built through interactions in the real world (Kushir, 2022). Nowadays, people interact online so they can develop their social cognition based on social media influencers. Social cognition skills help us to develop our ability to manage ourselves in a social situation.

1.3 Adolescents

Adolescents are individuals from the age group of 10 to 19 years. They experience rapid growth in physical, cognitive, and psychosocial (WHO, 2020). Adolescents now use many devices, like smartphones, tablets, and laptops, to go online constantly.

Nowadays, people possess more resources than in earlier times. Digital platforms that enable us to communicate, exchange information, and make connections with people are referred to as social media. Approximately 46% of U.S. adolescents were found to be online most of the time, which was double the past three-year report. The online platform poses some challenges or issues in the lives of adolescents, their families, counsellors, professionals, and policy makers (Nesi, 2020).

While it introduces some risks to adolescents' mental well-being, it also offers meaningful benefits (Pew Research Centre, 2018). Research shows that these platforms can lead to negative attitudes or actions among teenagers. Social media includes messaging apps, games, social networks, and blogs, such as Instagram, Facebook or Snapchat. The popularity of these social media platforms has increased over the past ten years. Presently, more than 80 % people use YouTube, 72 % use Instagram, and 69 % people use Snapchat regularly (Pew Research Centre, 2018). Adolescents who mostly use social media developed the symptoms of depression (Nesi, 2020).

For instance, research hasn't firmly established how screen time relates to mental health outcomes, and some findings conflict (Keles et al., 2020). Instagram has more than 1000 million active accounts globally. Among 120 million active users in India, 62.70% of users are aged 18-34 years (Clement, 2020).

1.4 Social Media

Social media is an integral part of daily life. It influences the way of communication, understanding and interaction with other people. In India, smartphones are used everywhere, as they are not very costly. The majority of people have smartphones, which is why they have their personal accounts on social media platforms. There are various social media platforms, but the most popularly used by young people in India are WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat. In 2020, the IAMAI reported that more than half of India's internet users are within the age range of 12 to 29 years.

Adolescents want to stay connected with their friends for entertainment or information seeking most of the time. Social media has several advantages, such as breaking down geographical barriers, creating relationships, enabling individuals to express themselves, and providing access to information for all. The use of social media may carry some risks, such as problems of sleep, unrealistic comparison, excessive screen time, false view of oneself, stress, and depression (Bozzola et al., 2022).

In 2023, the Global Web Index found that adolescents spend more than 2 hours on various social media daily. Researches show that people who use social media on average for three hours are more likely to experience symptoms of anxiety. (Farooq et al., 2023).

1.4.1 Passive and Active Social Media Usage

According to Pagani and Mirabello (2011), there are two types of social media usage. Passive and active usage of social media.

Passive social media usage

Passive social media usage is a type of social media behaviour in which a person engages with a social media platform. It involves observational behaviour without participation in direct interactions with the content. It includes browsing feeds, viewing profiles, and consuming the content (Taddi et al., 2024).

Active social media usage

Active social media usage is a type of social media behaviour in which a person actively and directly engages with a social media platform (Sherman et al., 2016). It includes sharing of content, either their own or others, engaging with others via direct messages, Likes, and comments. Active users share life experiences, create content, do critiques, or respond frequently to other users (Brandenberg et al., 2019).

2. Review of Literature

Blanc et al. (2025) aimed to examine the development of digital competence in children and adolescents in schools. Participants ranged in age from 9 to 18 years old. It was found that Digital competence is multifaceted, rooted in autonomy and self-efficacy. Older adolescents (13–18 years old) showed stronger associations between autonomy and digital skills than younger adolescents (10–12 years old).

Park et al. (2025) conducted a study on ‘Towards Resilience and Autonomy-based Approaches for Adolescents Online Safety’. He asked for teen-centric frameworks over restrictive parental controls. This study suggested shifting from restrictive to resilient based parenting style.

Hassoun et al. (2025) conducted a study that involved ethnographic studies with youth between the ages of 13 and 26 from the USA and India. It was found that most of the adolescents don’t go looking for information on social media; algorithms bring it to them. The results demonstrate that the focus should be

on guiding young people to explore reliable content and discuss it with others for a better understanding of the information. This study suggested some methods to help young people digitally. Exploring the work which is going on by people in online mode, and enhancing self-efficacy and resilience. We should not protect people from taking risks. People can learn from the potential risks and develop their skills to deal with them.

Koçyigit & Türk (2025) conducted a study on FOMO and loneliness among adolescents in social media platforms. Researchers surveyed 342 middle school students to examine how loneliness relates to fear of missing out. A study revealed that lonely teenagers face difficulty in managing their emotions and use social media excessively, which ultimately increases the FOMO in teens. The findings suggest interventions for adolescents to improve their social skills and emotional regulation to support their mental well-being.

Qamaria et al. (2025) reviewed the studies on digital resilience that were published between 2020 and 2024. The study aimed to explore the definition of digital resilience, the methodology used by the researchers, the theories, and the population. It was found that there is a lack of studies on adolescents' digital resilience. Future studies should focus on the digital resilience of teenagers and the models of digital resilience in current situations. Most studies use qualitative or mixed methods, and ecological theory is the main framework used.

Ziker et al. (2025) focused on parents attending to children in middle childhood (ages 6–12). A new approach to parental control, designed to build children's skills and encourage open conversations with their parents, can help children develop better self-control and become more resilient to online risks. When families set goals together, discuss plans before going online, and reflect afterwards, it not only helps kids manage their time but also strengthens trust and deepens the parent–child bond.

Artsin et al. (2024) analysed the studies related to social media in terms of education. Research papers published between 2017 and 2023 were analysed to investigate how social media has evolved as an education platform, mainly after the pandemic. It was found that social media has been the most established digital platform for educational purposes. Most of the studies were conducted on undergraduate students. It was noticed from popular social media Hashtags how education adapted during COVID-19. Tags, such as Bookstagram (for book reviews), Studygram (for study tips, motivational quotes), show that students use social media for self-directed learning without the help of their teachers.

Clemente-Suárez et al. (2024) reviewed studies on cognitive development and digital device usage in children. Digital devices enhanced the ability to multitask and processing skills. Excessive use of screens can lead to cognitive overload, difficulty in focusing, and problems with social skills. With proper support from parents, these negative effects can be reduced, and children's cognitive and behavioural development can be improved.

Ellis et al. (2024) studied the adverse effects of social media on the lives of teenagers. The results recognised 5 areas that are negatively affected by social media. They are social and emotional well-being, educational outcomes, psychological health, physical health, and their effect during COVID-19. The researcher identifies issues, such as peer pressure, cyberbullying, addiction, concerns related to body image, and sleep disruption. It also leads to poor academic performance due to procrastination and distractions from studies. The screen time of teens increased after the pandemic. Teens reduce face-to-face interaction with others and engage in social media most of the time. Adolescents need to learn the strategies to use social media responsibly to decrease the negative impact of social media on their lives.

Erez & Ağırkan (2024) found that self-perception and SEL skills negatively correlate with digital addiction. Adolescents with strong parental relationships are less likely to be digitally addicted. Digital addiction among teenagers is not affected by peer relationships. Parents can set a limit on smartphones or the internet for a particular time period. They should also follow the same rule so that teenagers can learn from them.

Haza et al. (2024) reviewed the studies of social cognition in children and adolescents with ADHD. It was found that there is an impairment in Theory of mind, facial emotion recognition, and everyday social skills in children and adolescents with ADHD. Future studies should work on the other aspects of cognition to get the overall information.

Korkmaz & Kiliç (2024) aimed to examine how Turkish middle school students engage in social media and their digital literacy skills. The attitude towards social media and social media addiction was assessed. It was found that the social media addiction level of these students was low. They show a positive attitude towards social media usage. They have moderate digital literacy skills. It can be concluded that social media addiction depends on the attitude towards social media and the digital literacy of middle school students.

Lin et al. (2024) conducted a study on perceived support and PSMU. This study was conducted on 1,056 adolescents (ages 12–17). It was found that Strong family support reduces social media addiction. Friend support does not significantly reduce social media harm.

McAlister et al. (2024) conducted a study, Social Media Use in Adolescents: Bans, Benefits, and Emotion Regulation Behaviours. It was discovered that although restrictions and strict limits on social media usage are becoming more widespread, there is little proof that they are effective. Social media provides many benefits to teenagers, such as helping them feel more connected, reducing loneliness, and offering a supportive environment, particularly for those from marginalised communities. Rather than enforcing strict rules, it may be more beneficial to focus on teaching teenagers how to handle their emotions and interact online in a healthy manner. This paper proposes a more thoughtful approach: moving away from ineffective bans, recognising beneficial aspects of the digital world, and supporting young people in developing emotional and self-regulation skills so they can responsibly use social media.

Putri et al. (2024) conducted a study on 'Mastering Digital Ethics: Uncovering the Influence of Self-Control, Peer Attachment, and Emotional Intelligence on Netiquette through Adolescent Social Media Exposure'. The study selected 237 adolescents aged 10–24 years for the research. It was found that adolescents with higher emotional intelligence demonstrate better online etiquette. Uncontrolled social media exposure increases the likelihood of negative digital behaviours. Peer attachment indirectly affects netiquette through social media exposure.

Sakaryali & Yigit (2024) aimed to study the social media addiction, emotional state, and mental well-being among teacher trainees. This study examines the effects of excessive social media use on the mental health university students to become early childhood educators. The findings reveal that students have moderate levels of social media addiction. It is linked to age and time usage on the internet, but not linked with gender. Due to positive digital engagement, it is found that participants have moderate mental well-being. The study provides insights for healthier relationships with technology among trainee educators.

Septiana et al. (2024) conducted a study on school counsellors to explore the strategies they use to manage the social anxiety of teenagers. The findings reveal that the causes of social anxiety are cyberbullying, lack of money, inability to adapt to a new environment, and lack of courage. The methods used by counsellors to manage these challenges include relaxation techniques, talking to oneself positively, bibliocounseling, and getting mental health education to stay healthy.

Taddi et al. (2024) aimed to study the social media usage, its perception and the mental health of adolescents in India. It was found that adolescents mostly use YouTube and Instagram as a way of interacting with their friends and to express themselves regularly. The advantages of using social media are getting connected with peers and sharing information easily. Teenagers are active on social media for an average of 2-3 hours regularly. It is found that more time spent on social media can affect their mental health.

Yam et al. (2024) studied the relationship between loneliness and social media addiction in adolescents. It was found that resilience helps in protecting the teenagers who are feeling lonely by getting over dependence on social media. The social media addiction can be decreased by developing resilience in lonely teenagers.

Canogullari et al. (2023) conducted a study to investigate social media addiction, social appearance anxiety, and social desirability among teenagers. It was found that girls showed higher social anxiety than boys. There is no gender difference in terms of social media addiction and social desirability. It was also found that social desirability and social appearance anxiety predict social media addiction.

Halldorsson et al. (2023) explored the cognition and emotional experiences of children with social anxiety disorder (SAD). A reflexive thematic analysis of interviews during the social stress task was conducted by analysing the transcripts of interviews of 12 children aged 8-12 years. The three themes that emerged were discomfort with attention, lack of cognitive awareness, and managing social fears. Developmental considerations are important in designing SAD interventions for children.

Kaya et al. (2023) found that higher social support decreases digital addiction risk. It can be said that perceived social support is related to the internet, gaming, social media, and technology addiction.

Lee and Hancock (2023) tried to help students get better at dealing with problems they face online. Their study found that the program helped students improve their skills with technology, feel more confident using digital tools, be more willing to support others online when needed, and be more ready to ask a trusted adult for help when they encounter difficult situations.

Mols et al. (2023) conducted a study on ‘Family Surveillance: Understanding Parental Monitoring, Reciprocal Practices, and Digital Resilience’. Adolescents and their parents were interviewed to explore the parental monitoring. It was found that parents use tracking apps and digital monitoring tools, but some

prefer open discussions. The most common forms of surveillance are location tracking and the monitoring of digital behaviour and screen time.

Setiansah et al. (2023) examine the Digital resilience in elderly people and their quality of life. The results of this study revealed that there is a lot of potential in older adults to learn skills of using the internet to connect with the digital world. It was found that older adults can build digital resilience to improve their social networks and overall quality of life. It challenged the stereotypes and encouraged older adults to pursue digital education.

Yahya et al. (2023) examined whether the use of Instagram leads to social comparison among female users. It was found that most of the users felt inspired by others' posts. Likes, followers, or comments did not influence their judgments of others. The majority of females are from the age group of 18 - 25. It was found that they are aware of using Instagram. They believe that people usually do not post their negative sides on Instagram.

Lou and Bussey (2022) explored the role of moral disengagement in cyber perpetration behaviour. Moral disengagement is the process through which a perpetrator justifies the bullying act to himself, to reduce the burden of guilt from his conscience. The results indicated that the students who had experienced cyberbullying as bystanders had a significantly higher probability of becoming cyber perpetrators later on. The results also indicated that the students who had suffered from cyber victimisation had a high probability of resorting to cyber perpetration later on. Students used the stratagems of moral disengagement to justify their acts of perpetration to themselves, since they had been exposed to and suffered from cyberbullying before, it was somehow justified for them to be involved in cyber perpetration. This research strongly points to a significantly high association between the three dimensions of cyberbullying with one another.

Kushnir (2022) conducted a study on imagination and social cognition in childhood. It was found that a person is biased based on their culture, beliefs, and experiences. Children think about others based on what they already know and believe. We do not do a deeper analysis of something. We generally conclude the situation based on familiar assumptions. Biases can be reduced if we consider alternative explanations for others' actions.

Gupta et al. (2022) reviewed the studies to explore both the risks and benefits of social media. The benefits are to improve communication skills, receive good information, and have an opportunity for self-expression. The negative impact of using social media includes cyberbullying, sleep disturbance,

depression, and suicidal thoughts. Social media should be used in a healthy manner to get its benefits to the fullest. Counsellors and parents are asked to help teenagers use social media responsibly.

Sun et al. (2022) reviewed 22 articles using content analysis. The researcher aimed to find the digital resilience of children in school settings. The researcher identified five key traits that help an individual develop digital resilience. digital resilience is a continuous skill and can be learned from experiences.

Schmid et al. (2022) conducted a study to introduce a web application. It could help social media users to find out the misinformation or incorrect content on Twitter. The app identifies the misleading content or false content and reveals it to the users. Social media users can decide the validity of the online content and share their opinions based on the true information.

Tso et al. (2022) wanted to look at how being skilled with digital tools affects the chance of developing a gaming addiction in kids and teens. This study was conducted with students. It was found that higher digital skills have a negative correlation with addiction to games. Gaming addiction is linked to higher cyberbullying victimisation rates. Digital competence may contribute to improved mental well-being by decreasing addiction to games and cyberbullying.

Xiao et al. (2022) found that short videos have the biggest negative effect on feelings of depression and anxiety. Social media use has positive effects on a person by watching it for entertainment purposes or connecting with friends and family. The negative effects of social media may involve posting risky content, being bullied online, or comparing ourselves to others. The findings of the study highlight the importance of using social media responsibly to stay safe from addiction and other negative effects.

Bhatia et al. (2021) examine how girls from low-income communities use digital technology to make their own choices and show independence, even though they sometimes go along with social rules online. Class and gender norms influence digital access more than economic factors. Girls find out ways to use social media. Like using it anonymously to hide from people and secretly use social media. A person can feel oppressed or empowered in surveillance. Quotidian Playful Resilience is the small, creative ways girls find to go online while still following the rules set by their families and communities. Digital access is negotiated via shared devices, disguised usage, and covert account creation. Girls sometimes judge their friends' behaviour online.

Eri et al. (2021) examines how university students from 5 countries perceive digital skills, confidence, and adaptability in online learning after COVID-19. The findings reveal that there is a difference in the

teaching styles and use of technologies among undergraduate students in these countries. It was found that with the help of institutions, students can build their digital resilience to develop skills for online education.

Pearcey et al. (2021) looked into how social anxiety connects with social thinking in kids and teenagers. They did a thorough review and analysis of 50 studies that came out between 1980 and 2019. Results indicated a correlation between social anxiety and social cognition. Socially anxious people struggle to understand others' thoughts, mainly the autistic population.

Saxena & Randhawa (2021) conducted a study to assess the level of digital addiction and its impact on psychosocial behaviour in adolescents. It was found that digital addiction and psychosocial behaviour among adolescents are correlated with each other. The researcher found that when students understand the risks of digital addiction and how to manage them, they're more likely to avoid social and emotional problems and handle challenges better.

Sharma et al. (2021) emphasise that overuse of technology can lead to unhealthy digital behaviours, such as cyberbullying, digital burnout, webinar fatigue, and doom surfing. This study also explains that digital failures can cause significant mental stress and can affect an individual's mental health.

Throuvala et al. (2021) conducted a study on secondary school teachers in the age group of 29–52 years old to investigate their psychosocial skills. Schools should include lessons on digital skills and emotional understanding. Skills like controlling emotions, being confident in expressing needs, and understanding others are important for avoiding harm online. Programs in schools can help lower the chances of online dangers. Teacher training is essential for digital literacy education. This study recommended investigating student perceptions of online harm prevention strategies.

Keles et al. (2020) reviewed the studies looking at how using social media affects teenagers' feelings of depression, anxiety, and stress. The results found that individuals who use social media to compare themselves with others and utilise excessive time in consuming the content on social media experience an adverse effect on their mental health. The time spent on social media and the number of followers do not have much effect on a person's mental health.

Hietajärvi (2019) conducted a study, 'Adolescents and their relation to academic wellbeing, motivation, and achievement'. Over 1,300 Finnish students across primary, secondary, and university levels were considered. The study reveals that emotional exhaustion from school predicted increased social media use. Digital engagement is multidimensional, not a single "screen time" metric.

Peled (2019) investigated the negative effects of cyberbullying on undergraduate students. Focus was on the social, emotional, and educational growth of students. The effect of cyberbullying was assessed regarding three life aspects of students: the academic aspect, social aspect, and emotional development aspect of undergraduate students. The incidence rate of cyberbullying came out to be 57%. The results marked Instant Messaging (IM) as the most commonly used way for cyberbullying perpetration among students. The results gave a definite indication that cyberbullying negatively affects the academic, social, and emotional developmental aspects of undergraduate students. It was also indicated that students who experience cyberbullying suffer from interpersonal relational problems, a downfall in their academic performance, home environment deterioration, family adjustment problems, depression, suicidal tendencies, and low self-esteem issues, as a result of their cyberbullying experience.

Dahl et al. (2018) reported the same finding that adolescents mark the onset of puberty and bring many physical changes and neurological processes. Furthermore, it was also found that during adolescence, along with the physical development, lots of changes take place in the brain, also leading to cognitive development that is different from the child's cognitive development. For example, due to the development of synapses and activation of the prefrontal cortex region, different social emotional learning skills, such as self-management, also develop. Moreover, some changes have also been observed in the social brain region of adolescents that make them more sensitive towards social signals and develop an emotional state. Therefore, adolescence is not only restricted to the physical and emotional changes, but it also faces pressure because of the increasing responsibilities towards their life, education, and career, friendship, personal relationships, and so on.

Smith & Anderson (2018) found that with regard to Americans, more than 70% of young adults use Snapchat and Instagram. Less than 50% of young adults use Twitter. The increase in popularity of social media has made it a subject of deep interest for researchers. Numerous studies are emerging studying the effect and impact of social media in recent times.

Hogan & Strasburger (2018) showed that teens with mental health issues are chronic users of social media. Social media is also increasingly used by teenagers to get sensitive health-related information, but the abundance of misinformation and false reports makes it a new challenge.

Smith (2018) explored the correlation of use of different social media platforms (Facebook, Snapchat, Instagaram etc) with self-esteem and life satisfaction among university students. He also observed a

reported decline in usage of Facebook by American young adults aged 18-25 years, with platforms like Instagram and Snapchat being more widely used by young consumers.

Crone & Konijn (2018) reported the emergence of a new type of risk-taking and sensation-seeking behaviour on the rise in adolescents, involving sexting and self-disclosure through social media.

Hinduja & Patchin (2017) explored the role of resilience as a protective factor against self-destructive outcomes of interpersonal harm. The study consisted of 1200 early adolescents aged between 12 and 17 from the United States. It was found that resilience serves as a protective factor against bullying and cyberbullying at some level. The resilient youngsters have a much higher probability of continuing to tolerate psychosocial problems for a longer duration of time, and their resilience towards cyberbullying. The fundamental beliefs of the young people regarding cyberbullying, their private incidents of cyberbullying, and digital adolescent dating violence were enlisted. Resilience was found to have a dual influence on the adolescents, as adolescents with greater levels of resilience had less tendency to report their cyberbullying incidents.

Ditch (2017) surveyed the digital media platforms where cyberbullying was taking place. The sample consisted of more than 11000 young adults in England. Instagram stood out as the most preferred online digital platform used for cyberbullying. The survey's results indicated that cyberbullying was spreading. At unparalleled rates, faster than anyone could foresee. More than 70% of the youth admitted to being digital harassers. 17% admitted to being cyber victims at least once in their lives. The intensity of the results was unexpected. 33% of the youth admitted that they lived in dread of online abuse. A large proportion of victims were bullied on Instagram, where the shallow reasons of outward appearance and having a smaller number of followers were the main reasons for harassment. It was followed by bullying on Facebook (6%), Snapchat (5%), Twitter (2%), and YouTube (2%).

McNicol & Thorsteinsson (2017) found that adolescents who showed high rumination and low self-care were at a higher risk of internet addiction. The study was conducted on people aged between 16 and 71 years old people. Adults showed high avoidance coping, anxiety, and emotional distress, which predict internet addiction. Problematic Internet users rely more on emotion-focused and avoidant coping strategies.

Wisniewski et al. (2017) found that mobile online safety apps allow the features of parental control to take care of teenagers and restrict them, and suggested doing self-control practices with them for better well-being.

Smith et al. (2017) conducted a study titled 'Bullying, Cyberbullying, Pupil Safety and Well-Being'. This study aimed to compare the cyberbullying scenarios between India, Australia, and Europe. They divided cyberbullying into subcategories by the kind of internet-based communication media or platform used. The internet-based communication media selected were phone calls, SMS, MMS, text messages, and IM-based pictures/ videos. The other variables used in the study were gender, age, consequences resulting from cyberbullying incidents, perception regarding cyberbullying, and tendency to ask for help. Cyberbullying resulted from the abuse of digital communication technologies. Data was collected from school students of the above-mentioned cities. The findings revealed that Indian school students were more exposed to internet-based bullying on technological media than the students in some European countries. Indian students had ranked higher than the students of other countries in all the sub-categories of cyberbullying, for example, SMS bullying, video clip bullying, etc.

Bevilacqua et al. (2017) researched the effect of the family's role on cyberbullying. Two dimensions of cyberbullying experience were considered: cyber-perpetration and cyber victimisation. The common factors were probed between the students who resorted to cyberbullying and the ones who suffered from cyberbullying. The sample consisted of 6667 students studying in the 7th grade in schools across the United Kingdom. Many common family-related factors were revealed by the study. For example, children of divorced parents were cyber-victimised more than the children of parents who were not divorced. It was also indicated that low socioeconomic status raised the chances of suffering from cyber victimisation. At the same time, a low socioeconomic status also increased the chances of becoming a cyber perpetrator.

Sherman et al. (2016) investigated the neural and behavioural responses to social media 'Likes' in adolescents. Using fMRI, researchers found that teens were more likely to like photos that already had many 'Likes', even a risky one. Their brains showed more rewards and social activity and less cognitive control for more risky images online with high social approval. Social media reinforcement and peer influence increase the risky behaviours in adolescents.

Wisniewski et al. (2016) conducted a study on 'Dear Diary: Teens Reflect on Their Weekly Online Risk Experiences'. It was a diary-based qualitative study for over 2 months with 68 adolescents aged 13–17 years. It was found that most teens reported encountering exposure to explicit content (74%) and information breaches. Teens mostly dealt with risks by ignoring, exiting, fixing, or confronting the situation. Peer-based Coping was taking place, and adult help was not taken.

Banjanin et al. (2015) found that excessive time on social media does not necessarily foster stronger relationships or activities like counting online friends or posting selfies, and depression. Findings of this study showed that internet use is correlated with depressive symptoms.

2.1 Rationale

Despite the growing interest in digital resilience among scholars, academicians and practitioners, there is still a big gap in research on this concept, mainly among adolescents in India (Bhatia et al., 2021; Sharma et al., 2021; Qamaria et al., 2025). Prior researchers worked on the digital well-being of people, such as screen time management, addiction to the internet, and awareness of a safe digital environment. Internal psychological factors are missing from the existing studies. From the literature, it was found that social-cognitive processes play a significant role in the lives of people. We need to study the internal psychological factors among adolescents to know how they understand, react and recover from the online negative situations. The insufficiency of digital resilience hinders our understanding of its complexity, especially in this digital age.

As per the existing studies, digital resilience is not only about what action people take externally to deal with the situation, such as blocking, reporting, changing privacy settings, but also about how they manage their emotions, thoughts and feelings. It includes the way they see others' perspectives, their intentions and behaviour in doing certain things (Nesi et al., 2018; Sun et al., 2022; Scott et al., 2023).

For instance, a negative comment received by a teenager may be perceived as a personal attack. It may lead to emotional distress, feel upset, or they might think that the other person may not be in a good mood or may be upset about something else. It could lead them to be calm and relaxed. Their perspectives on situations are determined by their actions, the way they interpret the situation, manage their emotions, and their previous experiences.

2.2 Research Gaps

1. Contextual Specificity to India: While digital resilience has been studied in many places, there is not much research focused on Indian teenagers.

2. Socio-Cognitive Mechanisms Understudied: The role of social cognition in adolescents' digital resilience is unexplored. Most of the studies worked on adults in this area. So, there is a need to work on the social cognition aspects in adolescents.

3. Lack of studies on Internal Factors: Few studies look into how internal psychological processes work together to build digital resilience in teenagers**.** Most research looks at external actions like blocking or reporting, but does not often explore the internal processes, such as how people think about situations, manage emotions, and understand others, which help them respond in a resilient way.

3. Description of Broad Area

The study aims to work on positive psychology and educational psychology. The special focus will be on adolescents. Positive psychology is the branch of psychology that focuses on human flourishing, well-being, and the experiences of people. It aims to understand and help people foster the positive aspects and well-being (Seligman, 2002). Educational psychology is a branch of psychology that focuses on the learning style, methods, and learning environment. Johann Herbert is the father of educational psychology. This branch of psychology aims to understand the cognitive, social, and emotional influences of learners and help them achieve their full potential in learning (Cherry, 2024). The goal of the research is to understand the digital resilience and social cognition among adolescents on social media.

4. Research Objectives

1. To explore adolescents' perspectives of digital resilience and social cognition in digital contexts.
2. To examine how social cognition (e.g., perspective-taking, emotion recognition, interpretation of intent) shapes digital behaviour and coping.
3. To explore the strategies adolescents use to deal with challenges on social media.

5. Research Questions

1. How do adolescents perceive digital resilience in the context of their social media activities?
2. What social-cognitive skills (e.g., empathy, interpreting others' intentions) do adolescents use in managing digital challenges?
3. What strategies do adolescents use to protect their mental well-being while engaging with social media?

6. Methods

Aim

The study aims to explore digital resilience & social cognition among adolescent social media users.

Research Design

The study adopts an exploratory research design. It investigates digital resilience and social cognition among adolescents who use social media. The study will provide in-depth insights into adolescents' perceptions, interpretations, and responses to online social interactions and challenges while using social media.

Population

The research involves teenagers aged 14 to 17 years from the Delhi NCR region. Participants will be selected from a variety of socio-demographic backgrounds, including government schools, private schools, and both male and female adolescents from the Delhi NCR region, representing their socio-economic statuses. According to the National Curriculum Framework (NCF, 2020), adolescents aged 14-17 years are classified as secondary school students, corresponding to Grades 9-12. This stage is characterised by having cognitive abilities, social-emotional development and increased engagement with social media. Adolescents who reported using social media for more than one hour per day will be included in the study to ensure digital exposure. Prior research indicates that adolescents who use social media for more than one hour per day encounter social feedback, navigate online risks and engage in coping strategies to deal with it (Odgers & Jensen, 2020; Valkenburg & Peter, 2013).

Inclusion criteria

Adolescents between the ages of 14 and 17 years

Adolescents studying in schools in the Delhi NCR region

Active social media users of at least one social media platform (Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp Group)

Individuals who are comfortable in the English language

Exclusion Criteria

Prevailing mental illness

Prevailing physical illness

Individuals who are not active users of social media

Time spent online (less than one hour a day)

Sample

The sample of the study involves adolescents who use social media actively.

Sampling techniques

The sampling techniques to be used in this research are Purposive and Snowball sampling techniques. These techniques will be used to include active adolescent social media users. Adolescents from the age group of 14 to 17 years old demonstrate cognitive abilities, emotional maturity and social interactions to reflect on online interactions and articulate coping strategies, digital skills and awareness of online risk (NCF, 2020; Livingstone et al., 2017; Blakemore & Mills, 2014).

Purposive Sampling Technique

The purposive sampling technique includes the students in this research based on the inclusive criteria. The researcher purposely selects a participant who is an active social media user.

Snowball Sampling Technique

The snowball sampling technique is used to take help from the participants to recruit other participants among their social connections. The researcher asks the selected participants to refer to others who fit the study criteria. This technique is used to reach hidden populations.

Sample Size

The Sample Size of the study will be approximately 25-30 participants (till data saturation). The participants will be selected from the Delhi NCR region.

Tools

- Semi-structured interviews will be conducted to explore and gain a deeper understanding of socio-cognitive processes and digital resilience in the context of social media use among adolescents. The interview schedule will be made in alignment with the research objectives. Thematic analysis will be conducted to explore the participants' experiences, emotions and meaning.
- A demographic information sheet will be used to record participants' age, gender, type of school, and socio-economic background.

Both semi-structured interview schedules and demographic information sheets will be reviewed and validated by Experts, including psychology academicians and professional counsellors. Interviews will take place either in a school setting or a place of the participant's choice to ensure comfort and

confidentiality. To ensure the credibility of the data, the researcher will first use primary data source triangulation, which involves collecting information from adolescents from different socio-demographic backgrounds (such as school type, gender, and socio-economic status), and will use secondary data triangulation, which will be incorporated during the analysis phase to validate the research findings.

Data Analysis

Thematic Analysis

Data from semi-structured interviews will be analysed thematically, using the model of Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis will reflect how social norms, culture and digital context shape the experiences of adolescents. It reflects the participants' experiences, emotions and meaning.

The analysis will follow six systematic phases:

1. Familiarisation with the Data: All interview sessions will be transcribed verbatim. The researcher will make initial notes to identify the patterns.
2. Coding phase: The key narratives from participants will be coded to find recurring coding in the data.
3. Searching for Themes: This stage involves grouping all coded data extracts under potential thematic headings.
4. Reviewing Themes: At this stage, some themes may be merged, refined, or discarded. Thematic maps will also create some illustrations to show how themes relate to each other.
5. Defining and Naming Themes: After finalising the themes, each theme will be identified, and a specific theme will be assigned to it.
6. Producing the Report: In this final stage, a detailed narrative will be developed, which includes the quotes from participants to elaborate on each theme. The analysis will be linked to the research objectives and existing literature to provide theoretical insight and contextual understanding.

Procedure

First Phase

Firstly, participants will be selected from 9th to 12^{th}-grade students studying in schools in Delhi NCR. Selection will be based on the inclusion criteria. Informed consent will be taken from their parents, and participants will be asked to give their assents for the interview sessions.

Second Phase

Adolescents will be asked to fill out their Demographic details. Semi-structured Interviews would be conducted in this phase.

Third Phase

The data that was collected using semi-structured interviews will be transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke's model (2006).

7. Expected Outcomes

The study explores how adolescents understand and deal with challenges on social media. Research will reveal how social cognitive skills, such as being able to understand others' perspectives, recognise emotions, or interpret someone's intent, play a critical role in adolescents' digital resilience. From adolescents' perspectives, we can gain clarity on what enhances or hinders resilience on digital platforms.

Conclusion

As global attention shifts to digital resilience, there is a need to explore the understanding of adolescents' social media use, how they cope with online challenges and deal with the adverse online situations (Nesi et al., 2018). This research focuses on the social cognitive skills of adolescents to understand their perspectives of others and their responses to online negative situations. The research is investigating the perspectives of adolescents in their digital world. To help young people in today's digital world, we need studies that research the inner thoughts of adolescents, mainly within the specific cultural norms of India. Their capacity to control their feelings or to interpret the thoughts of others is also important (Septiana et al., 2024).

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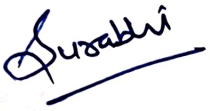
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